

STATEMENT OF THE CLAIMS

1 - 11 (cancelled)

12. (currently amended) A method of handling material comprising:

packaging material into elongate bags;
automatically arranging the elongate bags into groups, wherein at least one group has a cross-stacked configuration wherein a first set of bags are disposed side-by-side along their lengths and at least one additional bag is disposed orthogonal to and adjacent said first set of bags; and

automatically lifting and transporting said groups of elongate bags, group by group, to form a multi-row stack of elongate bags, said lifting and transporting accomplished by ~~applying opposed clamping forces to opposite sides of at least one group having a cross-stacked configuration while preventing elongate bags disposed side-by-side in said cross-stacked configuration from sliding past one another, said opposed clamping forces being applied to only two sides of the at least one group and said opposed clamping forces alone being sufficient to lift the at least one group;~~
—— wherein said automatic lifting and transporting said groups of elongate bags is ~~carried out by~~ a stacker machine having a moveable stacker head with two fingers and a flexible support structure, said two fingers applying that apply opposed clamping forces to grip a given group of elongate bags, and said flexible at least one support structure extending downward from above the given group of elongate bags and having a portion that is sandwiched ~~that is operably disposed~~ between adjacent bags disposed side-by-side

in said cross-stacked configuration such that a friction fit between the flexible support member portion and the adjacent bags prevents ~~to prevent~~ such bags from sliding past one another during lifting and transport of the given group of bags ~~while not providing~~ resistance to the ~~opposed clamping forces~~.

13. (original) A method according to claim 12, wherein:

said support structure comprises at least one chain.

14. (original) A method according to claim 12, wherein:

said support structure comprises one of wire strands and rope strands.

15 - 24 (cancelled)

25. (currently amended) A material handling system comprising:

means for packaging material into elongate bags;

means for automatically arranging the elongate bags into groups, wherein at least one group has a cross-stacked configuration wherein a first set of bags are disposed side-by-side along their lengths and at least one additional bag is disposed orthogonal to and adjacent said first set of bags; and

means for automatically lifting and transporting said groups of elongate bags, group by group, to form a multi-row stack of elongate bags, including ~~means for applying opposed clamping forces to opposite sides of at least one group having a cross-stacked configuration while preventing elongate bags disposed side-by-side in said cross-stacked~~

~~configuration from sliding past one another, said opposed clamping forces being applied to only two sides of the at least one group and said opposed clamping forces alone being sufficient to lift the at least one group;~~

~~— wherein said means for automatically lifting and transporting said groups of elongate bags comprises a stacker machine having a moveable stacker head with two fingers and a flexible support structure, said two fingers applying that apply opposed clamping forces to grip a given group of elongate bags, and said flexible at least one support structure extending downward from above the given group of elongate bags and having a portion that is sandwiched that is operably disposed between adjacent bags disposed side-by-side in said cross-stacked configuration such that a friction fit between the flexible support member portion and the adjacent bags prevents to prevent such bags from sliding past one another during lifting and transport of the given group of bags while not providing resistance to the opposed clamping forces.~~

26. (original) A material handling system according to claim 25, wherein:

said support structure comprises at least one chain.

27. (original) A material handling system according to claim 25, wherein:

said support structure comprises one of wire strands and rope strands.

28 - 37 (cancelled)